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Illinois Department of Healthcare
and Family Services
Barry S. Maram, Director



Important Information on Paternity for Unmarried Mothers and Mothers-to-Be

Division of Child Support Enforcement

Every child needs to know the identity of his or her father. Your child will grow up confident and secure knowing that he or she has a father as well as a mother.

What is Paternity?

PATERNITY MEANS LEGAL FATHERHOOD



Paternity is a legal relationship between a father and his child.

If you were not married to your baby's father when the child was born, he is not considered the legal father of that child. If you are going to have a baby, his name will not be added to the baby's birth certificate unless he establishes paternity.

Why Should I Establish Paternity?

To help ensure your child's right to have a relationship with his/her father and his family.

To add the father's name to the child's birth certificate.

To get a legal document proving the identity of your child's father.

To protect the father's rights if something should happen and you are unable to care for your child.

To be able to have your child added to his/her father's health insurance plan.

To make sure your child will have access to family medical records that contain information that could possibly save his or her life.

To be able to request child support if you and your baby's father's relationship ends.

To make sure that your child is eligible to receive his or her father's Social Security, veteran's benefits, and/or inheritance in the event of his/her father's death.

How can I make sure my child has a legal father?

Signing a Voluntary Acknowledgment of Paternity (VAP) at the hospital when your child is born is the easiest and fastest way to establish paternity and get the father's name on your baby's birth certificate.



You can also establish paternity at the Illinois Department of Healthcare and Family Services by:

- Signing the Voluntary Acknowledgment of Paternity
- Agreeing to accept the results of a genetic test
- You may also file a petition to establish paternity by obtaining a private attorney or going to court on your own.

I'm concerned about signing the paternity form because my child's father is abusive. Do I have to sign the form?

Signing the form is voluntary. If you fear harm to yourself or your child, you should not sign it. There are other ways to establish paternity through the Division of Child Support Enforcement. A Family Violence indicator may be included in your record. The decision is yours.

Please note: Families who are receiving public assistance are required to cooperate in the child support enforcement process, which includes establishing paternity. If you fear for your safety, tell your assistance caseworker your concerns and provide proof so that your public assistance will not be affected. Then you will not be required to cooperate in the child support program. An Order of Protection, police report, hospital report or letter from a domestic violence shelter is commonly accepted as proof for an exemption. If you do not have proof, you should ask that your record show your circumstances for future reference.

**National Domestic Violence Hotline
800-799-SAFE (7233)
TTY 1-800-787-3224 Chicago**

**Domestic Violence Help Line
1-877-TO END DV (863-6338)
TTY 1-877-863-6339**

Will I lose my public assistance if we sign the paternity form?

No, public assistance is based on the family's size and household income.

However, if you are receiving assistance, you will be asked to identify your child's father. The Division of Child Support Enforcement will send him a notice to attend an interview at a specific time and date. If he goes to the interview and can show he has little or no income, the child support order could be written for as little as \$0.

Are you going to make the father pay the hospital bills for the birth if he acknowledges paternity?

No, we will not bill him for the birth costs. However, if he has health insurance, we will seek to have the baby added to his health insurance.

He's the father, but I am/was married to someone else. Can we sign the Voluntary Acknowledgment of Paternity?

If the mother was married when she became pregnant, the husband is considered the legal father. You, the biological father and the husband will have to take other measures to have the biological father's name placed on the birth certificate.

Talk to hospital staff as soon as possible. They can explain the process and help you complete the necessary paperwork.

What if I am not sure he is the father. Should I sign the Voluntary Acknowledgment of Paternity (VAP) anyway?

No. If either you or the father is unsure who the biological father is, do not sign the VAP. Talk to hospital staff or the Division of Child Support Enforcement about having a genetic test to establish paternity.

What if he can't get to the hospital in time. Can we sign the VAP before the baby is born?

No. You cannot sign the VAP until the baby is born. If he is unable to be at the hospital before you and the baby leave, the hospital will send a form home with you. Both parents must provide a complete address as well as their date and place of birth. If you make a mistake, fill out a new VAP. If the VAP is not completed correctly, it can be rejected and the father's name may not be placed on the child's birth certificate.



Why do we have to provide addresses and correct Social Security numbers:

The Voluntary Acknowledgement of Paternity is a legal form and must meet certain legal requirements. You may use any address where you can receive mail. If the form includes a false name or Social Security number, it will not be legally valid. We do not check for citizenship.

What do I do if I need a paternity form?

You may get a form by calling:
1-800-447-4278

Send the completed and witnessed form to:

Administrative Coordination Unit
110 W. Lawrence Avenue
Springfield, IL 62704

I know he won't sign the Voluntary Acknowledgment of Paternity. Is there another way I can establish paternity?

Yes, Contact the Child Support Customer Service Call Center for more information on paternity establishment and other services: **1-800-447-4278**

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